Shinto was the only religion in Japan until the arrival of Buddhism in the 6th century CE.

Some Shinto shrines became Buddhist temples, existed within Buddhist temples, or had Buddhist priests in charge. Buddhist temples were built, and Buddhist ideas were explored.

Shinto was disestablished in 1946, when the Emperor lost his divine status as part of the Allied reformation of Japan.

The first inhabitants of Japan were probably animists; devoted to the spirits of nature. In their case these were the Kami that were found in plants and animals, mountains and seas, storms and earthquakes, sand and all significant natural phenomena.

Shinto can't be separated from Japan and the Japanese, but in the late 19th and first half of the 20th centuries Shinto became an established state religion, inextricably linked to the cause of Japanese nationalism.

In the 6th century Buddhism was imported into Japanese religious life and Buddhism and Shinto together began to play a part in Japanese government.

Japanese civic religion in the 17th century still included elements of Confucianism, while popular religion consisted mainly of Buddhism and Shinto. There was a movement towards a purer Shinto during the next two centuries, culminating in the Meiji Restoration towards the end of the 19th century, when Shinto became the established religion of Japan for a time.

**Shinto festivals – Matsuri:** The word *matsuri* can refer to any occasion for offering thanks and praise to a deity at a shrine. It comes from a word meaning 'to entertain' or 'to serve'. Matsuri is also used to refer to Shinto festivals.

A shrine (*jinja*) is a sacred place where kami live, and which show the power and nature of the kami. It's conventional in Japan to refer to Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples - but Shinto shrines actually are temples, despite not using that name. Every village and town or district in Japan will have its own Shinto shrine, dedicated to the local kami. The Japanese see shrines as both restful places filled with a sense of the sacred, and as the source of their spiritual vitality - they regard them as their spiritual home, and often attend the same shrine regularly throughout their lives. Shrines need not be buildings - rocks, trees, and mountains can all act as shrines, if they are special to kami.

Shinto shrines are places of intense calm with beautiful gardens. They possess a deeply spiritual atmosphere

**Shinto worship:** Shinto worship is highly ritualized, and follows strict conventions of protocol, order and control. It can take place in the home or in shrines.

**The spirit of Shinto worship:** In keeping with Shinto values, Shinto ritual should be carried out in a spirit of sincerity, cheerfulness and purity. -- Although Shinto worship features public and shared rituals at local shrines, it can also be a private and individual event, in which a person at a shrine (or in their home) prays to particular kami either to obtain something or to thank the kami for something good that has happened.

**The importance of ritual in Shinto:** Taking part in a series of actions or behaviours is a religious act that 'does' religion, provides a holistic religious experience, and strengthens the participants' relationships with the kami and with other members of the community. The lack of intellectual content is in one way is a strength, since it excludes the doubting mind. Taking part in festival procession through the village teaches that the spiritual is an inseparable part of this world, and that the community itself is a key focus of the participants' lives.

Specifically Shinto ethics are not based on a set of commandments or laws that tell the faithful how to behave, but on following the will of the kami.

The overall aims of Shinto ethics are to promote harmony and purity in all spheres of life. Purity is not just spiritual purity but moral purity: having a pure and sincere heart.

**ESSAY QUESTIONS**

*Describe a Kami, and tell how it is different from a god.*

Part I

* Nature or essence of someone (makes it unique)
* Everyone has a kami
* Spiritual

Part II

* Kami are not perfect
* They’re not omnipotent
* Some are evil
* They live along side us, unlike a god who lives in the heavens